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ABSTRACT

This paper outlines a program designed to teach adults to read better. Manzo discriminates between illiterate and semi-literate. The reading program is intended for semi-literate, often culturally different, economically depressed, program enrolled Adult Basic Education (ABE) students. Four teaching strategies are propsed to add an instructional component to mere reading practice in basal type materials. First, the ABE student should frequently be required to articulate reasons for both his correct and his incorrect responses made while working in auto-instructional adult basal materials. Second, the ABE student should regularly experience a full fledged Directed Reading Lesson, complete with readiness activity, purpose setting, and post-reading skills instruction. Third, the ABE should be taught how to establish his own purposes for reading, and, finally, he must learn to accurately recall information without the aid of the teacher. Causes of illiteracy and the effect of illiteracy on adaptive behaviors are discussed. Ideally, an ABE reading program should have a humanistic component, designed to give counsel to adults with attitudinal problems. (LL)

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Teaching Adults to Read

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From 0 to 60 in 9 seconds flat. For a time Adult Basic Education crawled along at a proverbial snail's pace. Then, without forewarning, an acceleration of journals, studies, commercial materials and expanded programs.

For all this activity, or perhaps because of it, it is very difficult to assess, even characterize, trends. Quality in all aspects of programming is uneven, with programming in reading being most variable. This is true because the teaching of reading, while most basic, is also most complex. Thus, it tends to reflect most fully the range of sophistication of the many who see ABE reading as their balivick: educators, psychologists, women's organizations, missionaries, previously unsuccessful teachers from elementary/secondary schools, and The Great Benevolent Bear - The Federal Bureaucracy.

This paper outlines a program to teach adults to read better. It will necessarily reflect the author's understandings and interpretations of adults, of adult education, and of reading. An attempt to include a review of current methods and materials in ABE was short circuited by a realization poignantly received from a recent book and a recent article.

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The book is called Materials and Methods in Adult Education. Author Chestea Klevens Publisher Klevens Publications, Inc., 1972. In almost any other realm of education the book would have been called "Methods and Materials in ...", and publication would have been by a standard commercial house. (The latter comment should in no way reflect on the quality of the book used for illustration.) As a further example of the state of methods development in ABE, consider a recent article by John Sherk - a reading specialist and Don Mocker - an ABE specialist. Their article, optimistically called "Reading Methods for Adult Basic Education," (Reading Improvement, Fall, 1972) turns out, to their dismay, to be a summary of ABE teacher ratings of adult reading materials.

With little to contradict it, it seems safe to conclude that the materials of ABE are the methods of ABE. Fortunately, the materials of ABE have improved remarkedly in recent years. Reading instruction in ABE, however, is still best understood in terms of "Learning Centers", kits and practice exercises. Individualization it is called. But instruction it is not.

Objectives and Strategies for an Adult Reading Program

A program proposed to teach adults to read will necessarily seem cryptic if readers and writer have not a common frame of reference in methods. To reduce the gap in communications, several of the methods cited below are elaborated beyond mere allusion.

There are at least 3 levels of immediate concern in developing a reading program: Pre-Reading Skills, Reading Skills, Reading-Study Skills. At each level in the development of this paper there were decision points. Choice of one direction over another was based on the writer's best understandings of the targeted population. For example, development of left-to-right orientation, and such basic concepts as small, medium and large are often considered to be important indicators of the cognitive development necessary to begin teaching more specific pre-reading skills, such as visual-auditory letter discrimination, etc. But, are these abilities good predicators with adults? Not likely. Appropriate diagnosis, however, will determine need for certain. Unusual needs aside, most adults have already acquired many of the mechanical, developmental and discrimination skills important to learning how to read. Fact is, most adults enrolled in ABE classes are better characterized as semi-literate, rather than illiterate (Leibert, 1972). For those others not enrolled in ABE programs, teaching them pre- pre-reading skills is not yet the problem. The reading design presented in this paper, then, is meant to mesh with the present population of semi-literate, often culturally different, economically depressed, but, nonetheless, program-enrolled ABE-students.

Pre-Reading Skills

At least 3 pre-reading skills need to be developed to get the reading process started and to help keep it going: Language, cultural-academic information, decoding.

.Language Development

Language development means the capability to express self clearly and effectively in both the community dialect and the language of the core

culture (Standard English dialect). It also needs having a sufficiently developed language system to "mediate" - name and dialectically process - the essential features of the reading design. Thus the objectives of this component are: 1. to improve oral speech patterns in standard English (to optimal level), 2. to enlarge vocabulary - the stock of precise meanings, 3. to develop and refine related cognitive skills such as listening, memory, etc., 4. to learn to verbalize with skill and fluency personal experiences.

.Cultural-Academic Information

Intimately, related to language, is cultural-academic information; i.e., exposure to and training in the essential characteristics of the "core" culture's academic and social heritage. This is necessary to establish empathy with most narratives and to deal with the barrage of cultural-academic allusions which punctuate most textual material in our culture.

The dilemma of teaching "language" and imparting cultural-academic orientation is too extensive to be developed here. The paradigm for achieving these goals is easily stated, however: Language and thinking are best improved through opportunity to interact with knowledgeable and compassionate people who are able to ellicit empathetic responses from the learner and who are themselves competent models of the desired language and thinking behaviors. For the interaction to be most profitable, it should deal with matters of personal emotional concern, and be so structured and focused as to prevent extraneous excursions from the topic under discussion. Bergevin's (1970) "Participation Training" techniques, Manzo's (1971) "languaging" techniques, and Glasser's (1970)[4] discussions without failure are all easily learned and require no expensive materials. There is also a relatively inexpensive

commercial material which embraces many of these language stimulation and thinking strategies. The material is called Concern (Silver Burdett Company, 1970). Individual topics - drugs, freedom, world religions - are cleverly and heuristically presented in pamphlet form.

.Decoding (Glass' Analysis)

"Decoding is not reading. Decoding should be taught separately from Reading," so believes Gerald Glass (1970). Whether this is exactly true or not is not as important as is the fact that the Glass-Analysis approach to teach the decoding aspect of reading is simple and intelligent.

In the Glass-Analysis approach, words are taught only in isolation. Context is an extraneous clue. The purpose of the Glass technique is not to teach the identification of the word. The word is merely utilized to help the learner form perceptual conditioning habits for a specific cluster of letters in a word and for other structural parts of the word. Thus, a lesson is not considered complete if the adult student can identify the word at sight. The lesson's purpose is served best when the learner has opportunity to work through several of the ways in which the letters in the word can be clustered. To aid the teacher in knowing which letter clusters are most useful to stress, Glass has made frequency counts of the occurrence of various vowel clusters in early reading material. In the first three books of the Scott-Foresman basal readers, for example, the cluster "ing" appears 109 times, versus only 5X's each for "ug", "een", and "ong".

The actual teaching procedure requires nothing more than some word cards and one of two oral protocols. The protocol which gives the word first is illustrated below:

Longest - In the word, "longest", what letter makes the "lll" sound?

What letters make the "ong" sound?
What letters make the "long" sound?
What letters make the "est" sound?
What letters make the "ongest" sound?
In the word, "longest", what sound does the /l/ make?
What sound does the o/n/g make?
What sound does the l/o/n/g make?
In the word "longest", what sound does e/s/t make?
What sound does o/n/g/e/s/t make?
If I took off the "l" what sound would be left?
If I took off the l/o/n/g, what sound would I have left?
If I took off the "est" sound, what sound would be left?
What is the whole word?

No part of the word is ever covered-up during the analysis. The purpose is to give instruction and practice in seeing, hearing and sounding the many possible arrangements of clusters of letters which consort to make decoding a "psycholinguistic guessing game".

Early Reading

The early reading stage has 3 basic components: Word Recognition, Language Experience, Basal Reading.

.Word Recognition

Only twenty percent of the total number of words in the English language do not follow the rules of phonics and spelling. These words, however, account for 80% of the highest frequency of words occurring in typical exposition (Hannah and Hannah, 1968). Thus, a large body of words are often taught as

"sight" words. Apart from phonetically irregular words, there are other reasons to teach some few sight words. These reasons are implicit in the recommendations below.

It is useful to think of 3 categories of sight words. The first, as previously mentioned, are those words which have a high frequency of occurrence, but low phoneme-grapheme correspondence. The Dolch list of 220 high frequency words is a good example of this category. The second category could be called "survival words": restaurant, men/caballeros/hombres/boys, danger, etc. The third would include a set of personal words which an adult requests. Sylvia Ashton Warner called these "organic words."

Methods for teaching, i.e., giving repetetive exposures to these words could include: 1) the buddy system - more advanced students flashing cards and giving corrective feedback for less advanced students; 2) audio-taped cards with accompanying word stimulus (as are used with the Bell and Howell Language Master); 3) studying word configurations (low priority); and 4) having students write a word following a visual studying or a hand tracing of it.

.Language Experience Story

The most frequent use of the learning experience story can be summarized as follows: The student tells a story which the teacher records in the student's own language. The student then practices reading his own production. This activity is expected to help the student to(1) learn to read those words which are in his oral repertoire; (2) develop a sense of both the limits and the unique potentialities of written communication; and, (3) to develop

reading passages which, by definition, are compatible with the student's language patterns and interests.

In addition to the above, the language-experience-story's use can be extended to improve reading comprehension and some language skills. In one such extended use, the story is reproduced in its exact, or some mildly author-teacher edited, form. A copy is distributed to the class, along with a series of comprehension questions prepared by the teacher to accompany it. From this point, the story is treated in much the same way as any reading selection might be: it is introduced to a class with some appropriate readiness discussion, diffcult and/or unusual terms are pre-taught, a purpose for reading is established, a comprehension check then follows silent reading. Essentially, an abbreviated Directed Reading Activity (Betts, 1935) is taught. The most unusual thing about this modification of the DRA is the presence of the author, and the fact that the story undoubtedly reflects the language experience and sophistication level of a peer.

As a follow-up to this type of DRA, a second set of exercises may be developed in which language and elements of rhetoric can be taught. An exercise, for example, may have several words underlined which were inappropriately used. A list of alternate choices of words are listed in the margin, or are elicited from the class. The student-author participates in the discussion, objectively scrutinizing his own choice of words. Other types of language-rhetoric activities might include deciding which of several means of stating and/or punctuating selected sections of the experience story would improve its mood or pungency (Manzo, 1973).

.Basal Reading

A most popular attitude in the teaching of reading is belief in a series of graded books of increasing levels of difficulty. The belief is that the learner progresses best when he can work through a series of passages which are geared to his "instructional" level - 97% accuracy in oral decoding and 75% accuracy in comprehension. Decoding accuracy and comprehension much above this would be "independent" reading level, and below "frustrational" reading level.

The trouble with this schema is that adults don't know about these handy categories. A recent study, by Robert Leibert (UMKC), sought to establish an Informal Reading Inventory (IRI) for adults by pre-and post-testing a national sample of adults enrolled in ABE programs across the country. Leibert's study disclosed three distressingly inaccurate assumptions: 1) there are very few (almost none) total illiterates enrolled in ABE programs, 2) ABE students rarely had solid independent reading levels, and 3) they rarely had an absolute frustrational level to the 6th to 8th grade levels to which many were tested. Further, these reading characteristics had changed very little over a period of many months of enrollment in ABE classes. The only minor change after almost a year of enrollment, was a slightly stronger independent level but virtually no change in instructional level. Many hypotheses are suggested by these findings. The one which seems most germane here, is Leibert's own conclusion that adults are not being taught. They are merely being "practiced." Consequently, little change in instructional level.

Four teaching strategies are proposed to add an instructional component to mere reading practice on basal type materials. First, the adult student should be required to frequently articulate the reasons for both his correct as well as his incorrect responses made while working in "auto-instructional", adult basal materials. Secondly, the ABE student should regularly experience a full fledged Directed Reading Lesson, one complete with readiness activity, purpose setting and post-reading skills instruction. Thirdly, the ABE student should be taught how to establish his own purposes for reading: how to inquire into and guide his own reading. For this the ReQuest - or reciprocal questioning - procedure is recommended (Manzo, 1969). Finally, adults must be taught how to accurately recall information without the aid of teacher questions. This requires learning to see "implicit questions" and to self-correct such inconsistencies in understanding as are evident in such questions. To aid in the development of these skills, a new technique, the Guided Reading Procedure (Manzo, 1972), is recommended.

Précis of GRP

After appropriate readiness and content purpose setting...

(1) Set major functional reading purposes: "Read to recall all"

(2) Teacher records unaided recalls on chalkboard.

(3) Students study recorded remembrance to find inconsistencies and missing information... i.e., 'implicit questions'.

(4) Students re-read with individuals answering whatever implicit questions were apparent to them.

(5) A simple or complex outline is constructed: at least main idea and supporting details.

(6) Comprehension is tested immediately.

(7) Optional: Medium term memory (24-48 hours later) is tested with conventional instrument or by unaided recall.

(8) Optional: At some convenient time, reorganize the outline into Question-Read-Respond notes to be studied; test long term memory (2 weeks or more) with conventional instrument or by an unaided recall test.

Charts comparing percentages of accuracy of recall can be kept of short term (immediately after reading), medium term (24-48 hours later) and long term (after 2 weeks) memory and comprehension. Test questions should properly reflect the level of analysis reached in discussions following the reading-recall period; i.e., inferences and insights reached in post-reading discussion should also be remembered. Questions requiring abstraction from and/or application of the new information may also occur in long term testing. These questions, however, should be separately labeled as "thought" or "discussion" questions and not be confused with questions which merely require recall.

Reading Study

Study-type reading is essentially a catch-all for over-learning. Not different from, but on a contiuum with reading, study-type reading is often done in preparation for an examination, or when information must be condensed for long term storage. The latter goal requires a somewhat different tact than the former.

Storage, at any level, is usually achieved by an additional manipulation of material beyond merely reading and understanding it. The GRP helps with this somewhat. More useful for long term storage, however, would be something like the X-Change Annotation Writing System (Manzo, 1973). Medium

term memory and test preparation are probably better served by the SQ3R technique (Robinson, 1962).

In SQ3R the student breaks information down into questions and responses which are recorded as notes and recited orally until over-learned. In contrast to this method of storage, the X-Change annotation scheme requires the student to condense the essence of a longer piece of exposition under thoughtful pressure into one of 5 specified annotation statements: summary, heuristic, precis, question, critical.

Virtually nothing more than a reading selection and appropriate techniques are necessary to teach study-type reading. Which is to say, there is probably little such teaching occurring in ABE programs. The absence of study-type reading instruction in ABE programs is an error which should not be permitted to continue. The absences of instruction in such higher order skills, must have the effect of telling the "functionally illiterate" adult that he is viewed as a terminal case. It is as if to say to the adult student, "Learn how to read to where you will no longer be a burden to yourself and society". This statement, while true enough, has not the same humanistic and motivational value as when higher order skills are taught. The latter seems to say, "Learn how to read and how to study so that you might continue to learn." The ABE student is primarily the product of psychological-aspirational despair. Teaching toward higher order skills could be a useful way to tell him that he is valued.

Reading Beyond Reading

As suggested above, an adult who cannot read is more than simply someone with a reading problem. Failure to learn to read is without parallel as a

social disability. Inability to read is associated with job failure, social failure, feelings of inadequacy and, not surprisingly, even correlates well with sexual impotence.

It is broadly believed that the functionally illiterate's cycle of failures is set off by his inability to read. For this reason, reading programs are generally designed to teach reading as if all other systems were "go". The enlightened program-director, however, is aware that the functionally illiterate adult has several seemingly less pressing, but equally vital, needs than simply learning to read; most noticably, freedom from the debilitating effects of an unproductive life, particularly from those emotional-visceral learnings which have prevented him from learning to read, viza vis, functioning effectively.

Fact is, much of the apparent failure of the functionally illiterate adult is related not to reading failure per se, not to intellectual deficiency, nor to physical handicap, but more likely to cultural isolation, prejudice, and/or the negative impact of a poor family situation.

The individual raised in such circumstances is often beset with inappropriate emotional responses which in turn engender an array of "maladaptive behaviors." As long as the particular maladaptive pattern which is causing failure continues, there can be little hope for substantial improvement in learning and in overall life condition.

An effective ABE reading program, to be complete, should have a humanistic component. A component designed to give counsel with attitudinal problems and capable of helping adults to desensitize and countercondition at least their most formidable maladaptive responses. Techniques for doing

the latter, while not currently in popular use, are relatively simple to apply. At least two of the major instigators of these techniques - Wolpe and Bandura - have said that highly trained clinicians are not necessary. Teachers, school nurses, even paraprofessionals could, they believe, be good "therapists" for carrying out such work (Bandura, 1969).

This last component of a program to teach adults to read is not included merely for its heuristic value. It is proposed in earnest. The functionally illiterate adult is one who has failed to learn under existing systems and conditions. Thus, by definition, his is an exceptional problem, and, therefore, may logically require some exceptional level of problem solving.

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